DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 425 161 SP 038 240

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TITLE Preservice Teachers' Learning about Diversity: The Influence of Their Existing Racial Attitudes and Beliefs.
PUB DATE 1998-10-17
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, October 14-17, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Consciousness Raising; *Diversity (Student); Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Multicultural Education; Preservice Teacher Education; Prior Learning; *Racial Attitudes; Self Evaluation (Individuals); Student Characteristics; *Student Teacher Attitudes; Student Teachers
IDENTIFIERS Reflective Thinking

ABSTRACT

This case study examined how three white preservice teachers were similar and dissimilar in terms of their racial attitudes and beliefs, their prior interracial experiences, and certain personal characteristics. Participants had taken a multicultural education course and had been part of a larger study of teacher candidates' attitudes about diversity and the effects of multicultural education courses on those attitudes. The three students completed the Quick Discrimination Index (a racial attitude survey) and structured interviews about their backgrounds, prior experiences with diversity, and attitudes and beliefs about teaching certain racial groups. The students also completed interviews that examined their attitudes about the multicultural course and its impact. Results of the case study indicated that multicultural education courses may be most effective for students who already possess more favorable racial attitudes and for those who display a quality of openness and an ability to be self-reflective. The study showed that students' entering racial attitudes and beliefs served as filters through which they perceived the information being presented to them. (Contains 26 references.) (SM)

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"Preservice Teachers' Learning about Diversity: The Influence of Their Existing Racial Attitudes and Beliefs"

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Educational Research Association, Chicago, October 14-17, 1998

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The purpose of this paper is to report the findings from a case study of three prospective teachers enrolled in a multicultural teacher education course at a large midwestern university. I will discuss how these three prospective teachers, all of whom were White, appeared to be similar and different in terms of their racial attitudes and beliefs, their prior interracial experiences, and certain personal characteristics. I will also describe important differences in how the three students responded to the course. Finally, I will discuss the implications that these findings seem to have for teacher educators.

Theoretical Framework

Most of the earlier research on the impact of multicultural teacher education courses (e.g., Bennett, Niggle, & Stage, 1990; Bondy, Schmitz, & Johnson 1993; Larke, 1990; McGeehan, 1982; Reed, 1993; Ross & Smith, 1992; Tran, Young, & Di Lella, 1994) appears to have been grounded on the underlying assumption that attitude change would come about as a result of knowledge growth. However, there is a large body of social psychological research (e.g., Bar-Tal, 1990; Bem, 1970; Oskamp, 1991; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Scheibe, 1970; Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991) indicating that people's existing attitudes and beliefs are major influences on how they interpret any new information and that their attitudes and beliefs tend to be quite resistant to change. Similarly, in the teacher education literature, many different researchers (e.g., Anderson & Holt-Reynolds, 1995; Bullough, 1991; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Goodman, 1988; Hollingsworth, 1989; Holt-Reynolds, 1991; Lortie, 1975; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996) have explained how prospective teachers' entering beliefs about teaching seem to serve as filters through which the information presented in teacher education programs is interpreted. Recent research (Garmon, 1996) on multicultural teacher education suggests that, in a similar fashion, information presented to prospective teachers about diversity is filtered through their existing racial attitudes and beliefs. In other words, what students learn from a course on diversity appears to be mediated by the racial attitudes and beliefs which they bring to the course. This research further suggests that, to increase the effectiveness of multicultural courses, we need to increase our understanding of this mediation process. In this study I sought to identify some of the mediating factors which may have contributed to the different learning outcomes that were observed for the three case study students.

Methods/Data Sources

The data for this study were a subset of the data gathered for a larger study (see Garmon, 1996) involving approximately 200 teacher candidates enrolled in a course focusing on issues of diversity. During the first two weeks of the course, I identified 31 volunteers and asked them to complete an adapted version of Ponterotto and Burkard's Quick Discrimination Index (Ponterotto & Pederson, 1993), an attitude survey intended to assess students' attitudes toward selected racial groups. I administered this survey again at the end of the course. In addition, I conducted a structured interview with each of the 31 volunteers near the beginning and again near the end of the course. The initial interview was designed to obtain additional information about students' backgrounds, their prior experiences with minority groups, and their attitudes and beliefs about teaching certain racial groups. The final interview focused primarily on their perceptions of the course and its impact on their attitudes and beliefs. On the basis of their scores on the initial attitude survey, 14 of the 31 volunteers--seven who displayed the most favorable attitudes towards racial minorities and seven who displayed the least favorable attitudes--were identified as target students and were then interviewed every two weeks through the rest of the semester. These interviews were relatively open-ended, as I asked the students to talk about their perceptions of the course and about what they were learning. All interviews were audiotaped and then later transcribed for analysis.

For this substudy, I selected three students whom I felt would be most illustrative of the range of students in the target group. The first student, Claire, resembled four other low-scoring students in terms of the beliefs and attitudes she expressed and in the ways that she responded to the course material and activities. The second student, Joy, was very similar to one other low student in that, during the course of the semester, both of them seemed to be critically re-evaluating their present beliefs and were moving toward developing more favorable racial attitudes. Although Terri, the third student, had considerably more prior experience with diversity than the six other high-scoring target students, she was nonetheless quite similar to them in terms of the beliefs and attitudes she expressed in our interviews and in the ways that she responded to the course material and activities.

Results

In this section I will begin by providing some background information on each of the three focal students. Then I will discuss how these students seemed to respond differently to some of the course content. Finally, I will discuss how some of their personal qualities seemed to influence how they responded to the course.

Student Profiles

Claire (low) Claire, a sophomore, is the youngest child in a middle-class family of four. She attended high school in a small suburban town where the minority student population was extremely small. Claire's high school activities were band, track, and Students Against Drunk Driving, and she also held an after-school job. Claire reported some personal involvement in a nondenominational church during high school, though it was apparently not sustained, and she gave no indication of the extent that her parents were involved. Her father has an associate's degree and is employed as a firefighter in the neighboring city. Her mother works in a university dormitory and just recently earned her degree from a local business college. Although it is difficult to say much about her relationship with her parents, some of her statements during the interviews indicate that they have had a strong impact on her thinking in several areas. Claire described herself as a very outgoing person who is not a follower. Although she had made friends with people of different races since coming to the university, all of her close friends were White because, as she explained it, those were the people that she had grown up with; it was not because she didn't like other people.

At the beginning of this course, Claire's awareness of prejudice and discrimination seemed to be quite limited, and she did not appear to be particularly open to evidence of their continuing existence. Her own experience seemed to be the standard by which she judged the veracity of allegations of discrimination. For example, because of her own experiences in school, she rejected the notion that women and minorities face unequal opportunities to learn.

> I don't believe that these people that are listed--the minorities, special needs, girls, etc.--face unequal opportunities. I'm a girl. My major is math, so I kind of like prove it wrong in a sense there. If somebody has a will, then they'll go as far as they want to, and whether a person does go far, it's not because they don't have the opportunity. I just believe it's because they don't want to. [Claire 211-70]

She didn't seem to even consider the possibility that the schooling experiences of others might have been vastly differently than hers. Throughout the semester Claire professed an exceptionally strong belief that everyone has equal opportunities, and as a corollary, she also believed that a person's success or failure was dependent strictly on his/her own efforts.

> I was always told when I was young, you know, I can do whatever I want, and I think it's that way with anybody. I don't see why it would make a difference if you're minority or special need or anything. If that's what you want to do, you're going to set your goal and work towards it. [Claire 211-74]

Although she considered herself to be unprejudiced and open-minded, Claire seemed to possess some stereotypical beliefs about racial minorities. First, she seemed to conceive of them as being poor, and she acknowledged that sometimes lack of money could constrain their opportunities. She also seemed to believe that the lower school achievement of minority children is a consequence of their problem-filled home environments. Third, when asked for an additional explanation of why most minority students don't perform as well in school as most White students, Claire responded,

> I don't know. Maybe it's hereditary and the genes don't carry through to carry a lot of information. I mean, I don't think it's because they've been taught less or something to that effect, 'cause like I said before, everybody's got the same opportunity, I believe. [Claire 211-84]

In her perception, since all students have an equal opportunity to learn, if minority students are not achieving on a par with White students, it must be the result of some deficiency in the minorities, perhaps a hereditary deficiency. Claire discounts the possibility that schools or teachers might contribute to the achievement discrepancy.

Joy (low). Joy comes from a middle- to upper middle-class family of five, the oldest of three girls. From a large Detroit suburb, she attended a high school which she described as "very diverse," though, based on her descriptions, it sounded as though the largest minority group was the Caldeans. Joy was very active in high school activities, including student government and sports. During the last three years of high school, she coached elementary and junior high girls' basketball teams. There was never any mention of her or her family being involved with a church. Both of her parents are college graduates. Joy's mother teaches in a nearby suburban city and her father owns a manufacturing business. Joy did not talk much about her father, but she seemed to be quite proud of her mother. It also appears that her mother had a major impact on Joy's life, particularly on some of her attitudes toward minorities and her beliefs about teaching. Joy reported that her circle of friends, close and casual, was not very diverse, instead being very much like her. She seemed to be a bright, bubbly, friendly person. She was usually quite talkative and always seemed to be open and honest. Joy took her involvement in the research quite seriously and was the only one of the participants who regularly came to the interviews with a few notes written down about things she wanted to say.

At the beginning of the course Joy seemed to be somewhat more aware of prejudice and discrimination than was Claire. For example, regarding new immigrants to this country, she said, "I don't feel that we should be able to, like, discriminate because a child doesn't really understand English that well." It is noteworthy that she recognized the failure to provide equal learning opportunities for immigrants as a type of discrimination. Joy also expressed the belief that being open-minded and accepting people's differences were important.

> You have to realize that everybody's different and because they believe in something different than you doesn't make them wrong; it doesn't make them horrible people whatever; that's just their views. What I think we need to teach our children is that being different is okay. [Joy 128-34]

On the question of whether schools, along with celebrating Christmas, should also celebrate the holidays of other religions, Joy commented that "Sometimes the majority shouldn't always rule. I think we need to accept everyone's views." Further evidence of Joy's belief in being accepting of differences comes from her response to a question about how she, as a teacher, would respond to a group of shy Native American students who were not participating in class.

> I'm going to want a lot of participation because I think people learn through participation, being in active discussion and stuff, but I would never want to, like, make the children feel uncomfortable if that was their background, that maybe they were shy. . . . I mean, if that's what they have learned and that's what their customs are. [Joy 128-99]

The fact that this belief appeared in different forms at different points in the interview suggests that it was a sincere and deeply held one. Finally, Joy acknowledged that minority students do not have equal opportunities to learn in school, and she posited the major reason as being the unconscious prejudice of teachers.

Despite her open-mindedness, her acceptance of differences, and her awareness of prejudice and discrimination, Joy also held some other beliefs that would appear to be problematic in working with diverse learners. First, a recurrent theme in her first interview was the belief that working hard pays off, a belief that was instilled in her by her mother.

> I mean, [my mother] taught me from when I was a little girl, you know. We'd go out and play basketball together. She taught me everything, and she always taught me that working hard pays off. [Joy 128-24]

As was the case with Claire, this belief led Joy to conclude that when people didn't succeed, it was due to their not being willing to work hard.

> I hope I'm not generalizing, but like Detroit, and how kids aren't seeing that if they work hard in school that that can get 'em just as far as going out and selling drugs. I think a lot of people, like in general, don't understand that working hard pays off. [Joy 128-22]

In addition, I think this belief made it easy for Joy to adopt her mother's belief that minority students do poorly in school because they lack motivation and don't come from good homes. Her mother teaches in a school with a large percentage of minority children, and Joy commented,

> She is constantly thinking of motivating, because that's what these children--, they just need motivating right now. I mean, they're just so stuck in a rut, and a lot of these children don't come from very good homes. [Joy 128-14]

Along a similar vein, Joy believes that one reason White children do better in school is that they come from homes where the expectations are higher. Thus, although Joy seemed to have a genuine belief in the importance of accepting differences, some of her other strongly held beliefs seemed to be in conflict with that belief. Additionally, while Joy said that her high school was "very diverse," it seems significant that she reported having no Level Three (close) or Level Two (casual) friendships with individuals who were not White.

Terri (high). Terri, a freshman, comes from a middle-class family of five, the oldest of three children. She attended a racially diverse school in medium-sized city, where she was very active in a wide variety of school activities. Terri and her family have also been active in their church, and her religion seems to be very important to her. She reported having a lot of experience with people who are different than she. Terri appeared to be quite sensitive to and compassionate toward others. Her high level of involvement in school and church activities, as well as numerous comments that she made during the initial interview, suggests that she is a doer; she wants to be the kind of person who goes out and changes things. She wants to make a difference. Terri has a boyfriend whom she described as biracial, and she said that at first her parents had a lot of trouble accepting that. Finally, Terri's reports of past incidents in her life seem to suggest that she is a strong and a principled person who will stand up for what she believes in.

In numerous ways Terri demonstrated greater awareness and a much deeper understanding of the problem of prejudice and discrimination than did either Claire or Joy. In our initial interview she commented that because of her background, she had found during the first few class sessions that she was farther along the path of accepting and celebrating diversity than were many of the other students in the class.

> My friends are from all different backgrounds, all different races, and when I sit in the class and when we talk in our lab, I hear people saying, "I've never met anyone that's different than me. My school was all White. My school was all this." Well, my school was very diverse. I learned all that. I mean, I just think that a lot of the experiences I've had and knowing what to do and what not to do, I've learned definitely not to stereotype people, and I see so many people doing it here. It's because they don't know at all, and I think that I've been educated well enough. I mean, I just think that I have had enough experiences right now that a lot of these things we read about, a lot of these things I have already known, I've already experienced, but there's a lot of people in the class that are looking at this for the first time, and they're just thinking, "Oh, my gol." It's so new to them, but to me it's not new at all. [Terri 131-60]

In many respects, Terri began the semester already possessing much of the awareness we hoped to develop in students taking the course. Although she believed that minorities had equal opportunities to learn at her high school, she demonstrated a fairly good understanding of how learning opportunities were not equal elsewhere. Terri believed that the lower school achievement by minority students was due to several factors: lower expectations on the part of the teachers, poor student motivation, and lack of appropriate parental influence. In talking about the lower school achievement of minority students and about the vignette about Native Americans students, Terri clearly demonstrated a reluctance to make broad generalizations about racial/cultural groups. In addition to her boyfriend, who is biracial, Terri indicated that several of her closest friends were Black.

As can be seen from the background descriptions, each of the three students began the course with different beliefs about racial minorities and different levels of awareness of racism and discrimination. My analysis of our interviews across the semester revealed that these three students also appeared to have reacted differently to some of the information and activities and to have learned different things

from the course. While I believe that these outcome differences are primarily attributable to the differences in students' beliefs and attitudes that existed at the outset of the course, I also believe that students' personal qualities played an important role. In this section I will explain how the students reacted differently to course content, what they learned from the course, and how some of their personal qualities seemed to influence their responses to the course content.

How Students Reacted to Course Content

Although all three students were exposed to the same information and to the same activities during the CEP 240 course, their responses to the material were often quite different. In fact, it appeared as though the students' racial attitudes and beliefs served as a filter through which they interpreted the information and the experiences that they were presented with in the course. In other words, it appeared as though the meaning that the students gave to a particular lesson or activity was at least partly a function of the attitudes and beliefs through which they perceived the lesson or activity. In this section of the paper I will highlight two particular course activities and illustrate how these three students' responded differently to the activities.

The first class activity that provides a good illustration of the differences in the students' responses was a videotape of a 20/20 (ABC) television segment entitled "True Colors," which all students viewed in their lab sections early in the semester. In this particular segment two men--one Black and one White--who were very similar in terms of their age, education, socioeconomic status, etc., were asked to go to St. Louis, where they were followed with hidden cameras and microphones as they went shopping, looked for an apartment, applied for jobs, and were placed in various other situations. The two men were treated very differently in nearly every situation, and the major message of the video was that racial discrimination is still a problem in our society. Claire, Joy, and Terri each responded differently to their viewing of this video.

Claire. In mid-February during her second interview with me, I asked Claire for her reaction to the "True Colors" video.

> I really didn't think there was that much difference out in the real world. I kind of sat there in shock. . . . I guess I just didn't realize that it was that different, you know, that they're treated that different. [Claire 211-367]

So, her initial reaction was one of great surprise. She said that she did not realize that Blacks were treated so differently. I said to her, "But you saw evidence, didn't you?" and Claire responded, "Yeah, this is true. Unfortunately, it obviously happens" [Claire 211-388]. A short time later in the same interview, after some additional discussion, I asked Claire, "The people who treated those two guys differently, what would you call what they were doing?" Claire's response was, "Definitely discrimination" [Claire 211-438]. I asked this question to ascertain whether or not she recognized that the video was illustrating the existence of racial discrimination. Apparently, she did recognize it.

Two months later in mid-April during our fifth interview, I had the following exchange (edited) with Claire:

> *In what ways is it a benefit to be White in this country?*
> I don't really see any. I guess in society you make it out to be that there are advantages to being White. I don't see 'em that way. [Claire 412-225]

Claire's comment seems to be inconsistent with the message of the "True Colors" video, which showed that the White man had the advantage of not being discriminated against. Her comment is consistent, however, with the belief that she expressed numerous times in the first interview: that everyone has equal opportunities. If Claire were to admit that there are advantages to being White, it would be difficult for her to also believe that everyone has equal opportunities.

After some more discussion, I showed Claire a newspaper article with statistics on the income differential between Whites and minorities in the metropolitan area. I then asked her to explain the discrepancy in income.

> I don't think it's because there isn't an equal chance. I think everybody has an equal opportunity, and especially now and within the last couple years because they've become more aware of not hiring somebody because they're Black or whatever. [Claire 412-298]

Even in the face of contradictory evidence, Claire clings to her belief that everyone has an equal opportunity. She doesn't know why there is such a wide discrepancy in the income levels of Whites and minorities, but she refuses to even entertain the notion that it could be because of differential treatment.

As our discussion continued, Claire made a comment suggesting that a person's income level is related to their educational level. I asked her whether Whites tend to have more education than Blacks and Hispanics.

> No, I don't think so at all. Like I said, everybody has an equal opportunity as far as who wants to pursue it more; that's their option.
> *This article shows unemployment in the metropolitan area. Do you have any theories as to why there are more Blacks and Hispanics unemployed than there are Whites?*
> I think if I had seen that for, like, ten years ago, I would have said it was because of the problem with not employing somebody because they are Black or because they are Hispanic. As far as now, I have no idea. . . .As far as why there's more Blacks and Hispanics unemployed, I don't know, but there's a variety of reasons for unemployment, and it's not because of race or color. [Claire 412-298]

Claire continues to cling tenaciously to her belief that everyone has equal opportunities, despite being presented with more information to the contrary. She doesn't know why the unemployment discrepancy exists, but once again she refuses to even allow the possibility that it could be because of racial discrimination. In mid-February, after watching the "True Colors" video, Claire appeared to recognized that racial discrimination still occurs, but apparently during the next two months, she either had forgotten or had reconstructed the message of that video.

In our final interview, when I asked Claire to identify for me the three most important things that she learned from the course, she said, "I know one of the things that I noticed was that diversity is so apparent in real life, but I guess I never realized it, like the 'True Colors,' when we watched that. It was really interesting" [Claire 429-2]. A short time later, when I asked her to identify the class sessions that she thought were the most valuable, Claire responded, "I really liked 'True Colors.' I found that really interesting of how the diversity is so different and so intense out there" [Claire 429-46]. Still later in the interview, as she is responding to the question "Why do most poor and minority students not perform as well in school?" Claire makes the following comment: "If you relate it to the movie 'True Colors,' like, you know, the Black guy went to get a job and he couldn't get 'em, you know; it was the White population out there" [Claire 429-64]. The fact that Claire refers to the "True Colors" three times in this interview is irrefutable evidence that she had not forgotten about it. Not only has she not forgotten about it, she identifies it as one of the most valuable parts of the class and its message as one of her most valuable learnings. The problem, however, is that she has recast the message. In her mind, the video was about diversity, not about discrimination. Although it is not clear what she meant by "diversity," it is clear from her earlier comments that she knows what discrimination is, and she chooses not to use the term "discrimination" in reference to the video. Therefore, the meaning that she has given to the video is different than what was intended. But by giving the video a different meaning, Claire was able to hold on to her belief that everyone has equal opportunities, as the following passage from later in the same interview illustrates.

> *Do you think minorities have equal opportunities to learn?*
> Yeah. Again, there's always going to be people out there that are prejudiced, but I think they have the same equal opportunities.
> *Okay, you're saying minorities have the same opportunities. What are you basing that on?*
> Especially, again, like lately, like they can't ask you what your race is on a job application, and I think it's just progressing further that they have just as much opportunity as everyone else. [Claire 429-82,84]

It seems clear that the original impact and message of "True Colors" has been lost. Its message of discrimination was not consistent with Claire's belief that everyone has equal opportunities, and because she could not simultaneously acknowledge that discrimination exists and at the same time hold on to her belief that everyone has equal opportunities, she reconstructed the meaning of the video so that it would not conflict with her belief, rather than change her belief.

Joy. The "True Colors" video had quite a different impact on Joy than it did on Claire. In our second interview Joy offered her reactions to viewing the video.

> I watched that in my sociology class last semester. To me it's just fascinating how in this day and age how everything's supposed to be so equal and equality blah, blah, blah, how things are not equal. I think it's not even just on the Black-White issue, 'cause I know I've been in stores, like we talked about this in our recitation. I've been in stores, like, by myself and because I'm a teenager, you know, they watch you. They look at you differently, whereas I go in the same store, you know, and I have my mom with me, and they're there to help you, no problem, so I think that it's on all levels, but I think it's really interesting. Because I'd seen it before, it wasn't as powerful. Do you know what I'm saying? It was more powerful the first time I saw it, but it was really neat to, like, see people in my class going, "I can't believe this really happens," you know. It was really, really fascinating to me. [Joy 210-228]

Because she had seen the video the previous semester, Joy did not react to it with the same surprise as did Claire. Joy does indicate, however, that the first time she saw it, it had had a powerful impact on her. Her observation that "things are not equal" seems to be an indication that she was clearly aware that the message of the video was that racial discrimination is still a problem in this society. Additionally, her comment that it is not just a Black-White issue and her relating of her own experience with being discriminated against in stores suggest that she began the course with a greater awareness of discrimination than did Claire. For Joy, therefore, viewing the video again served as a reaffirmation of something she already knew, and she seemed to derive satisfaction from watching many of her classmates' reactions of surprise to the events in the video.

Two months later, I asked Joy the same question I asked Claire: "Do you believe that there are benefits to being White in America?" Joy responded as follows,

> Definitely. It goes back to in lecture how we saw the Black man and the White man who were totally equal and the White man was getting so many more opportunities and not, like in the store, not looked at as maybe a thief or whatever, and as a White person, with my parents being, like, middle-class whatever, I feel I got a lot of--, a very good education, like before college, and then being White also. It goes back to money. Being able to come to Michigan State and get an even better education. So definitely I think being White has advantages. [Joy 407-449]

Not only does she readily admit that there are benefits to being White, she also cites the "True Colors" video as evidence for her belief. In doing so, she appears to demonstrate an understanding that discrimination against one group generally translates into or is associated with advantages for another group. In contrast to Claire, who apparently forgot about the message of "True Colors" two months later when discussing the condition of minorities in this society, Joy did not forget and seemed to use it as one basis for her belief that Whites are advantaged in this society. Because she had already acknowledged that racial discrimination exists in this society and that Whites have numerous advantages as a result of this discrimination, I did not ask Joy to explain the discrepancies between the education and income of Whites and minorities, as I did with Claire. It was pretty evident to me that Joy already possessed this awareness.

In my final interview with Joy, she made two additional references to the "True Colors" video which clearly indicated that, in contrast to Claire, she had neither forgotten nor reconstructed its central message. First, she identified the "True Colors" video as one of the class sessions that had been most valuable for her. She offered the following explanation.

> "True Colors" was just the fact that--, it was a realization for me of how prejudiced our society is, just in the simple fact of you have the Black man and the White man going to the store. I

> mean, (sound effect), it just (sound effect). I don't know; it bothered me. Just the outright prejudice, you know, that you could see on the camera, and then when people got caught, [they'd say] "I didn't do it." I mean, what are you talking about? We were watching you do it right now, you know. [Joy 428-60]

Clearly, Joy was able to recall the central message that the video had presented. Her second reference to the video actually came at an earlier point in the final interview, when I had asked her to identify the three most important things she had learned from the class. As one of her learnings Joy mentioned discrimination. Our dialogue then proceeded as follows:

> *What do you mean by you learned about discrimination? Give me an example or something.*
> Okay, when we watched the movie on--
> *"True Colors"?*
> Yeah, "True Colors" whatever. It's kind of like I always knew it was out there, but literally seeing it in front of my face, I realized, God, I mean, like the store owner automatically suspected that the Black person was going to steal something, and I think there's been times where I thought that also, like working in the store, and I realize that I must have a little bit of discrimination also in myself, and I realize that that's wrong, like I shouldn't have those biases and those prejudices against---
> *Why is that an important learning to you?*
> Because I think it's going to help me out. If I realize I am now, in the classroom hopefully I'll be able to keep everyone equal, you know, instead of being like--. I'm learning all about separate but equal, you know. I don't want that. Equal is equal, you know. Whether you're Black or whether you're White or whether you're Hispanic or Asian, I think all children should be regarded the same, and that's my responsibility, to make sure that my views, maybe stuff that, like I said before, has been instilled in me from a long time ago, that that doesn't come out, because as a teacher I'm a huge role model for these children. I'm a mom to 30 children, and if they see my prejudice and negative views, that's what they're going to take from me, and I have to set an example for these kids. [Joy 428-6,8,10]

While at the end of the course Claire did not even acknowledge the existence of racial discrimination in our society, Joy definitely does. In fact, Joy's remarks show that she has moved beyond simply having an increased awareness of it in the larger society; she also reports realizing that she herself has discriminated. She seems to have internalized her awareness and is now able to see biases not only in others but also in herself. For her, racial discrimination is no longer just something "out there"; she recognizes that she herself has biases and that, as a future teacher, she needs to overcome those biases for the benefit of her students. Certainly, Joy, much moreso than Claire, shows evidence that she is moving toward developing the awareness and attitudes that will enable her to work more effectively with minority children.

Terri. Because Terri began the course with a pretty well developed awareness of racism and discrimination, her response to the "True Colors" video was quite different from that of Claire or Joy. Having grown up in a diverse community and having attended a high school that was approximately 50% minority (predominantly African American), Terri brought to the course considerable knowledge of and experience with diversity. Early in the semester Terri became aware of just how different her background was from that of most of her classmates and how much more aware of racial issues she was. In her first interview with me Terri commented,

> I think that based on a lot of the experiences that I've experienced in [my hometown] that it makes me a stronger person. A lot of people who come here and see things firsthand are really surprised in the way some people act and some ways people react and that. I feel that I've already experienced a lot of that, considering a lot of the things that have happened to me, and so while everybody else is reacting to what they've seen, I can just look at it from a different perspective because I've already seen a lot of the things that people from little towns haven't seen at all and only see on TV. I know the difference between stereotypical things or things that really happen because you learn to decipher between those things. [Terri 131-16]

Although she doesn't explicitly mention racism or discrimination in the preceding passage, I believe that that is what she was making reference to because most of the early class sessions addressed those two topics. As I had done with Claire and Joy, during my second interview with Terri I asked for her reaction to the "True Colors" video.

> . . . I've already seen it before. I believe my reaction was pretty much the same. I think that it does happen. . . . I think that if everyone could watch that tape and people [could] see that it happens. You know, there's too many people in the United States that say, "Racism doesn't happen. This and this doesn't happen." You can say all those stories, but it's never happened to you. People just assume that people aren't going to be that rude or aren't going to--, you know, that they aren't consciously doing it when maybe they are consciously doing it. They are, and it really can hurt people, so I do think that that was very eye-opening for people who haven't seen it yet. It opened my eyes, definitely, when I watched it last semester.
> *So if I asked you what you learned from it, you'd say what?*
> Well, that racism does exist and that people do treat others differently, I would have to say.
> *Even though you went to a diverse high school, you weren't aware of that?*
> Oh, yeah. I mean, I have a boyfriend who is [biracial]. I mean, we have gotten stares; we've gotten this and that. I mean, I've heard comments. Standing in line at Cedar Point, some guy said, "What a waste, and blah blah blah." I mean, I hear comments all the time. I got comments from my parents. I got comments from whomever, so I mean, I myself have seen it and have felt it--not to an extreme of, you know, a lot of people who go through it everyday, but I mean, I at least know that it exists. Definitely.
> *So then how did this video open your eyes if you were already---?*
> I just think that a lot of the different varieties that it came in--at the store and this and that, so I can see a store and I can understand. I've seen that before, so that wasn't really anything new, but even the car salesman, the man himself who was Black and didn't rush out there either, and the different prices [that they were quoted] and when [the salespeople] were confronted about it. It's just a lot of different things. I mean, I've never gone and priced a car, so I've never seen that before, so it's really just a lot of the different areas that you found it in.
> [Terri 217-312,330,334,342]

Like Joy, Terri had seen the "True Colors" video in a class the previous semester, but whereas for Joy the initial viewing of the video represented a surprising introduction to the reality of racial discrimination, for Terri viewing the video served primarily to reinforce and extend what she already knew from personal experience. Unlike Joy and many of her classmates, Terri already knew that racism and discrimination existed and that some people truly are as rude and discriminatory as the individuals depicted in the video. As a partner in an interracial relationship, Terri had experienced numerous racial comments directed at her personally, and evidently, she had also witnessed acts of racial discrimination in some settings. Despite her prior awareness, Terri still found the video instructive, but in a different way than it was for Joy. As Terri explained, seeing the various settings in which racial discrimination occurred in the video expanded her existing understanding of the different forms that it can take.

In her final interview, Terri identified "True Colors" as one of the class sessions that she considered the most valuable. When I asked her to explain why she thought the video was valuable, she explained,

> I think that one got the most response out of a lot of the people. . . . I think that the "True Colors", you know, would show something to a lot of people.
> *What impact would it have?*
> Well, I think the realization that people are treated differently, and I think a lot of people, you know, they know that doesn't happen anymore and this and that, but that whole show was just total proof of whether it's still happening in our society today. [Terri 426-32,42]

Interestingly, Terri appeared to feel that the primary value in the showing of the "True Colors" video lay, not in any new knowledge or awareness that she herself might have gained from seeing it, but rather in the awareness that it might bring to some of her classmates, particularly those who contended that racial discrimination "doesn't happen anymore." Terri obviously believes that discrimination is still a problem in this society, and she seems to want others to come to that realization as well. Whereas the video seemed to lead Joy to examine her own attitudes and actions, it prompted Terri, who already possessed

favorable racial attitudes, to see it as a vehicle for possibly increasing the awareness among her classmates.

In summary, the message of the "True Colors" video clashed with Claire's belief that everyone has equal opportunities in this society; therefore, she ascribed to it a meaning different than the one it was intended to convey. By interpreting "True Colors" as being about diversity, not discrimination, Claire was able to consider it one of the most valuable parts of the course and still hold on to her belief that everyone has equal opportunities. For Joy, the message of the video was easy to accept and remember because it reinforced her growing awareness of the problems of racism and discrimination. With this awareness she was beginning to recognize her own biases and to think about the implications that they would have for her as a teacher. Thus, viewing the video seemed to serve as an additional catalyst for growth. Finally, for Terri, the message of the video was a type of affirmation of something she was already well aware of through personal experience. In fact, she seemed to consider the central value of the video as lying in the fact that it made visible for others the reality of discrimination and, in so doing, might serve to increase their awareness.

Another class activity that illustrates the different ways that the three students responded would be the role-playing activities (see Appendix A) in which students engaged at different points during the semester. The role-playing activities dealt with issues like racism, sexism, inclusion, immigrants, sexual preference, abortion, and numerous others. For these activities students were typically divided into groups of four to five students. Each student was then given a slip of paper which briefly described the position he/she was to take on the particular issue that the group was to discuss. Generally, one of the five students would serve as an observer and would not participate in the discussion, but at the end of the discussion (usually no more than ten minutes), this observer would tell the other group members what he/she had observed. Depending on what other activities were scheduled for that particular class period and the amount of time available, there would generally be some whole-class discussion of what had occurred in the various groups.

Claire. Claire did not have a positive reaction to the role-playing activities. In particular, she objected to having to assume someone else's position in a discussion.

> I like it as far as just reading through 'em and reading, like, this person has this view point and there's this one, but knowing that I have my own and how I would react is what I would rather do than to try and react as somebody else is going to, because going through and reading it, I know their opinion and so it just kinda--, I don't know how to phrase it, but does that make sense? They have their own opinion and I have mine. I accept theirs whether I agree with it or not.
> *But you find it hard to argue their opinions?*
> Well, not necessarily that, but I mean, I would rather go at it with my opinion and attempt to do or say something that I would in real life, under my opinion, knowing theirs and kinda, I guess you'd say "compromising," rather than to know my opinion but try and act somebody else's opinion. I guess I would just rather be able to read it and know of this other opinion that's out there. [Claire 325-134]

Although Claire was interested in reading about the opinions of others, she did not seem to see the value in taking on another person's perspective in discussing an issue. Apparently, despite having participated in the activity several times, she didn't seem to recognize that arguing a position different than her own could help her to understand that position more fully. Typically, the various positions were described only in 2-4 sentences on little slips of paper that the students were given, yet Claire asserted that "going through and reading it, I know their opinion," suggesting that perhaps she felt she already understood the positions just from these brief descriptions. Her later statement, "I would just rather be able to read it and know of this other opinion that's out there" offers further evidence that she may have been more interested in knowing about other positions than she was in understanding them; or, maybe in her mind, awareness of others' opinions was equivalent to understanding them.

In her final interview Claire identified the role-playing activities as one of the least valuable aspects of the course, for essentially the same reasons as she had mentioned previously.

> I think I would have found it just as interesting to talk about it as a group and just kind of mention that, okay, this is an opinion and this is what they might think or this is how they might react whatever, but I'm always going to have my opinion, and like I've said, just to know the other opinions and other sides of things has been what's come across most to me in this class, and so I--, I don't know, I guess I found it not that important to play a different role, when I'm going to have my own [opinion], but just to go through and discuss the different sides rather than to play 'em out. [Claire 429-44]

Claire says, "I'm always going to have my opinion," and it seems that she is reluctant to let go of her opinion, even for a few minutes during role-playing. Because she has her own opinion, she believes that it is "not that important to play a different role." She seems to be saying that because her opinion on the issue is already decided, she doesn't need to try to look at it from another perspective; she is merely interested in hearing what the other opinions are. Her comments give me the impression that her opinion is already set and being exposed to others' opinions isn't likely to change hers.

Joy. Joy's reaction to the role-playing activities was quite different than Claire's. Rather than resisting the taking on of another person's perspective, Joy seemed to enjoy doing so.

> What really sticks out in my mind is when we do role-playing. I think that's so fascinating to take on a completely different opinion than my own. It kind of scares me because sometimes I can argue that opinion *really* well, and people are looking at me like, "Does she really think that?" I mean, something horrible, like about racism or stuff, and then I have ask to myself, "I made a lot of convincing arguments right there, you know. Maybe this isn't--," do you see what I'm saying? Like, maybe there is a little bit of prej--, I know there's a little bit because I think we all have prejudice, but I think there is prejudice in the back of my head. For me to be able to argue a situation so well actually kind of scared me, you know. [Joy 210-228]

Joy didn't explain why she thought it was "so fascinating to take on a completely different opinion than my own," but she obviously saw some value in doing so, whereas Claire apparently did not. The fact that Joy was able to argue a different opinion really well suggests that she had the ability to look at an issue from another's perspective. This being the case, I suspect that she was probably able to gain a better understanding of that perspective than was Claire. But for Joy, perhaps more important than any understanding that she may have gained of a different perspective may have been the insight that she gained into herself. She commented that her ability to play negative roles so well was rather frightening because she realized that that could indicate that she had some of those prejudiced thoughts in the back of her head already.

> *Is it possible that the role-playing brought out your real feelings, and the rest of the time you're just pretending to be a certain way?*)
> I'm sure it's possible. I'm sure some of the stuff that I said is in the back of my head. Do you know what I'm saying? Like some of the prejudice that I have--- Yeah, I think a truth comes out, you know, when you do that kind of stuff. [Joy 210-322]

Joy acknowledged that some of the prejudiced views she expressed in the role-playing may actually have been her true feelings. Thus, for Joy, the role-playing provided an opportunity to learn not only about others but also about herself.

In her final interview, Joy identified the role-playing activities as being one of the most valuable aspects of the course for her.

> Role-playing was because even though they weren't, like, their views, it just seemed [valuable] to try and work out different situations, you know, because maybe I don't have those views, but somebody out in that world is as negative as I was playing that role, and how do I deal with that person. That was that for me. [Joy 428-60]

One value that Joy saw in the role-playing was that it provided some preparation for dealing with individuals who actually hold the views represented in the role-playing situations. Unlike Claire, who seems most interested in merely gaining an awareness of others' views, Joy seems to be interested in

understanding others' views and how to deal with them. Also unlike Claire, Joy says nothing that suggests that her views on the various issues are already set and not open to change.

Terri. Although Terri talked about the role-playing activities only in the final interview, she also identified them as one of the most valuable parts of the course.

> I liked a lot of the different role-plays that we had to do, and I liked the discussions that we would get into in lab. My suggestion would probably be that sometimes, because you just presented it to your group, you would work on it and then, you know, end up doing whatever, but I think that if you had to get up in front of the whole class that--, although there's a lot of people that would get nervous about it, but it would help with people not getting nervous 'cause you get to know the people in the class, but I think that also, you know, it would raise other people's consciousness, and when you're doing that in front of everyone, you're going to work hard to be your part and to discuss and to do things I think a little more. [Terri 426-24]

Terri does not say so directly, but the fact that she liked the role-playing would suggest that she wasn't bothered by having to represent an opinion other than her own in the discussions. Terri's perception of the value of the role-playing activities was quite different from that of either Claire or Joy.

> *And the role-playing, what was the value in that?*
> In that, it got a lot of discussion and because it told you what to say on there whatever, too. A lot of those ideas were things that people wouldn't think of. I mean, they weren't ideas of like a lot of people, and to argue that was kind of hard, but then when you heard people talking about it and arguing the different sides, I think that it just brought out a lot of conversation, brought out a lot of things that people feel and then we got to talk through it. [Terri 426-38]

In Terri's eyes, the greatest value in the role-playing activities was the discussion that it generated because it brought out people's feelings and gave them the opportunity to talk about them. As with the "True Colors" video, Terri seemed to be more interested in how the role-playing impacted her classmates than she was in its impact on herself. Again, I think this might be a reflection of the fact that she saw herself as being more racially aware than most of her classmates. Terri's comments on "True Colors" suggested that she wants to see her less aware classmates exposed to things that will increase their awareness of racial issues, and she apparently saw the role-playing activities as another vehicle for doing that.

In summary, the three students' responses to the role-playing activities follow a pattern similar to that I observed with the "True Colors" video. Once again, Claire seems to have missed the point of the activity. She did not appear to regard the role-playing as an opportunity to "walk a mile" in someone else's shoes and to gain a better understanding of others' perspectives. Claire stressed that she already had her own opinion on issues, and she apparently did not want to give up those opinions, even for a few minutes, to view the issues from another's perspective. As with the "True Colors" video, she seemed reluctant to allow outside information to interfere with what she already believed. Of the three students, Joy, again, seemed to be the one who learned the most from the activity. Not only could she see value in taking on the perspectives of others through role-playing, she also gained some insight about herself. Like the "True Colors" video, the role-playing activities helped to increase Joy's awareness of her own biases and probably served as another catalyst to her growth. Although Terri did not explain any of her personal reactions to the role-playing, she did view it as one of the most valuable activities in the course. Once again, however, she seemed to see their major value as lying in the fact that they might serve to increase the awareness of some of her classmates.

<u>The Influence of Personal Qualities</u>

While this study was centered on how racial attitudes and beliefs influence what students learn from a course on diversity, it became apparent to me during my analysis of the interviews for the three focus students that certain personal qualities also seemed to play an important role in determining how they responded to the course content. Specifically, I noticed that these three students seemed to differ in terms of their openness and their ability to be self-reflective. In this discussion I define *openness* as being receptive to others' ideas or arguments (i.e., open-minded) and also as being accepting of diversity. I define *self-reflective* as having an awareness of one's own beliefs and attitudes, as well as

being willing and/or able to think critically about them. While these two qualities are different, they are related, so I will discuss them together.

Claire. Although she considered herself to be open-minded, in my opinion Claire actually showed little evidence of openness. In our third interview I asked her to explain what she meant when she said she was open-minded.

> *I need to get a sense of what you mean when you say you're open-minded.*
> I feel that everybody has an equal opportunity, that, you know, if maybe somebody is Black and maybe somebody is White. It's a physical difference, but we still both put our pants on one leg at a time. As far as anything else, like, you can walk around on campus and see maybe somebody has had half their head shaved and half of it's not. Well, if that's what they want, then so be it. It's not something I would choose to have done, but as long as it's not disruptive to other people or something to that effect, if someone wants to do something like that, that's their choice. [Claire 225-70]

She seemed to understand the meaning of open-minded, and there were occasions in the interviews when she made comments that seemed consistent with being open-minded. For example, in our fourth interview she commented,

> I have picked up a lot from this class as far as seeing situations, seeing other people's opinions and viewpoints on the subject, other than my own, and whether or not I agree with them, I accept them because they're theirs, but it also lets me see the other side. [Claire 325-134]

Nevertheless, despite occasional remarks like the one above, her interviews overall suggest that she was not at all open to ideas that conflicted with her own. The role-playing activities in CEP 240 provided students with opportunities to further their understanding of different perspectives on various diversity issues and to reflect on and perhaps clarify their own beliefs. As I explained in the previous section of this chapter, Claire resisted the role-playing activities because they required her to take on a perspective different than her own.

> I'm always going to have my opinion, and like I've said, just to know the other opinions and other sides of things has been what's come across most to me in this class, and so I don't know; I guess I found it not that important to play a different role, when I'm going to have my own [opinion], but just to go through and discuss the different sides rather than to play 'em out. [Claire 429-44]

Apparently, Claire wanted to hear about other perspectives, but she did not want to look at an issue from one of those perspectives, though doing so might have enhanced her understanding of that perspective. She seemed to believe that because she already had her opinion on the issue (an opinion that, apparently, was not open to change), there was no need for her to try to understand others' opinions; awareness of those opinions seemed to be sufficient for her. It is possible that Claire's distaste for role-playing, in and of itself, had nothing to do with her openness or her self-reflectiveness; however, the weight of other evidence suggests otherwise.

In analyzing Claire's interviews, I noticed a number of instances where being exposed to new ideas or ideas that conflicted with her own led her, not to reappraise and reflect on, but to reiterate and defend what she already believed. For example, during our fifth interview I asked Claire whether or not she believed there were advantages to being White in this society, and we spent a good portion of that interview discussing this question. Claire answered that she didn't think that Whites had any advantages. I then asked her to consider the question from another perspective:

> *Try to imagine someone who would argue that there are advantages to being White. What would they say would be some of the benefits?*
> I think maybe it's not a benefit but I think more expectation would be one because out in society your majority have the power and so you should be able to do whatever. I think being minority actually has better benefits as far as society goes because they've got their scholarships--Latino and Black, and there's scholarships for White but not just a White person. I mean, from what I've

> seen, and I haven't seen 'em all, but if a White person can apply for a scholarship, anybody can, but there's specified scholarships and stuff for just Blacks or just Latino or whatever, so as far as being White, I think that would be a disadvantage in society, but then they have the higher expectations so they're expecting you to be able to make more money and not need the scholarship or whatever. [Claire 412-244]

Rather than identifying possible advantages to being White, Claire instead asserted that minorities have more benefits than Whites. Her response suggests to me that she was either unable or unwilling to identify benefits to being White in this society. Once again she seemed to have her opinion on the issue, and she didn't seem willing to entertain an alternative perspective. Later in the same interview I showed Claire an article from the local newspaper which pointed out the discrepancies in the average annual incomes for Whites and non-Whites in the local metropolitan area.

> *Looking at this article from the [local newspaper], how would you explain the difference in the average income of Whites and minorities in the [metropolitan] area?*
> I don't think it's because there isn't an equal chance. I think everybody has an equal opportunity, and especially now and within the last couple years because they'vebecome more aware of not hiring somebody because they're Black or whatever. Maybe it is a White person in a higher paid position. I mean, there's several reasons I'm sure, but maybe the Hispanic or Black whatever didn't want that position. . . . I don't think it has anything to do with being Black, Hispanic, or being White. I think a lot of it has to do with what they want to pursue. [Claire 412-298]

When confronted with statistics that would seem to contradict her idea that everyone has equal opportunities, Claire, rather than reconsidering her belief, attempted to explain the statistics away by suggesting that the explanation might lie within the individuals themselves. She suggested that maybe Blacks and Hispanics didn't want the higher-paying jobs. As we discussed the income differences further, Claire later commented, "I don't know why there's a difference. Maybe Whites have more motivation. As far as why, I don't know." [Claire 412-381]. She steadfastly refused to reconsider her notion that everyone has equal opportunities, preferring instead to attribute the differences to Whites being more motivated than minorities. (I find it interesting that, on the one hand, Claire suggested that race didn't matter, but on the other hand, she argued that Whites may be more motivated.) I continued to push Claire by showing her another article with statistics on unemployment in the area.

> *This article shows unemployment in the [metropolitan]area. Do you have any theories as to why there are more Blacks and Hispanics unemployed than there are Whites?*
> I think if I had seen that for, like, ten years ago, I would have said it was because of the problem with not employing somebody because they are Black or because they are Hispanic. As far as now, I have no idea. I don't think it's because of lack of motivation, although there are people, Black and White and Hispanic and everybody, who don't have the motivation. They just don't want to do anything, but it's not because of their race. That's just them. I don't think it's lack of opportunity. I mean, anybody could get a part-time job, I'm sure, flopping burgers. . . . As far as why there's more Blacks and Hispanics unemployed, I don't know, but there's a variety of reasons for unemployment, and it's not because of race or color. [Claire 412-427]

The first part of Claire's response indicates that she believed that racial discrimination was a thing of the past, and apparently she was still not willing to re-examine that belief in light of the statistical data that I had shown her. In my mind, the preceding excerpts provide clear evidence of Claire's lack of openness to conflicting ideas and her unwillingness to be critical of her own beliefs and attitudes. However, there is additional evidence.

Earlier in this chapter I explained how, for Claire, the showing of the "True Colors" video did not push her to re-examine her beliefs about everyone having equal opportunities in this country. Rather than critically re-evaluating her belief in light of this new information, she appeared to reconstruct the meaning of video to make it consistent with her existing belief. As further evidence, one of Claire's comments during our second interview suggests that in her lab section she may have been exposed to conflicting opinions which she also either failed to acknowledge or perhaps just misinterpreted.

> There is a lot of diversity, just in our room alone, which makes it really interesting because then you can get both sides of any story, seeing how, for example, the Black people feel like they're being discriminated against, and the White people, as well--, just getting both sides of the story, which was really interesting.
> *Besides being interesting, is there any other reason why that seems important?*
> Just to show that, I mean, everybody has the same opportunities. It's available to anyone, I guess. [Claire 211-257]

I was not present in Claire's lab section; however, if the Black students in her class were complaining about being discriminated against, it is unlikely that they also felt that everyone has equal opportunities. Yet, in some mysterious way, Claire seemed to interpret what these students had to say as being consistent with her belief that everyone has equal opportunities. Claire may have heard both sides of the story, but it doesn't appear as though hearing the other side had any impact on her beliefs, except maybe to reinforce them. Again I think she demonstrated either an inability or an unwillingness to open up her existing beliefs and attitudes to critical re-examination when she was confronted with conflicting information.

While Claire seemed to believe that she was open to diversity, some of her comments suggest otherwise. During our second interview, Claire offered the following remark:

> There's one thing that, I guess, really bothers me. I don't have like a great all-time solution, but we've been talking about diversity and everything, like the story we read for class about the Indian. . . . okay, this Indian comes into class. Well, then they have to start changing everything, so "Oh, okay, let's have a day for everybody to have their own holiday and let's do this so that everybody's included." . . . sometimes, and this is kinda mean, but sometimes I'm glad I'm in math because everybody deals with numbers; they're straight across the board and I don't have to worry about, you know, Egyptian numbers or (laughs) [inaudible] numbers. It's just numbers, and so sometimes in that respect I'm kind of glad that I'm there. [Claire 211-494]

Claire's apparent concern about having to change things in order to accommodate people who are different seems to suggest that she regarded celebrating diversity as a problem that she'd rather not have to deal with. She went on to explain that she thought it would be difficult to balance between those who want to include others and those who want to leave others out. Though it may not have been her intention, this explanation suggests that she would make changes in her classroom primarily to please others and to avoid controversy, not out of any personal belief in acknowledging and celebrating diversity. Her insinuation that diversity would not be an issue in teaching math prompted me to ask her another question:

> *Don't diversity issues come up in mathematics? I know you're dealing with numbers, but you're also dealing with people.*
> Oh, this is true. When I become a teacher, I don't want to become, like, next door neighbor, best-friend buddies with every single student, but you know, to be a part of their life maybe as a coach or just a friend that they can come talk to or something, so there'll be differences but still in that fact it's not going to mean any difference in the way I teach. It'll just make it interesting because I'll have a variety of backgrounds and cultures et cetera. [Claire, 211-547]

In essence, Claire seemed to think that having diverse learners in her classroom would be interesting, but it would have no effect on her instruction. She went on to explain that "I wouldn't treat 'em any different or think that they're any less of a person, although it might take more one on one or something" [Claire 211-571]. This final comment subtly suggests that she thought diverse students were likely to be academically deficient and to require extra attention. In her final interview Claire made another comment which leads me to question her openness to diversity

> . . . Black people have, as far as I know, the exact same rights as we do. I mean, they can vote; they have freedom of speech, etcetera, you know, and it's almost to the point of where I think, "What else do you want?" [Claire 429-104]

If Claire feels that racial minorities already have equal opportunities and are asking for too much, she is less likely to see the need for or to be supportive of efforts to promote diversity.

In addition to Claire's lack of open-mindedness and her lack of openness to diversity, there was also evidence that she was not very aware of her own racial attitudes and beliefs. Numerous times during the semester she made statements that people were people to her and that their race didn't matter, but she also made a couple of shocking statements which seemed to contradict those assertions of equality. Specifically, she hypothesized that one reason for the lower school achievement of Blacks may be that they are genetically inferior. On another occasion she suggested that one reason the average income of Whites is higher than that of Blacks and Hispanics is that Whites are more motivated. There were also numerous instances when she voiced more subtle stereotypes that also contradicted her claims of equality, including her apparent assumption that minority children come from problem-filled home environments, that they will need more help academically, and her well-meaning observation that "any Black person can be just as good as a White person" [Claire 211-457]. Given the preceding evidence of some of Claire's stereotypical beliefs about racial minorities, the following comment from the final interview seems to highlight her lack of self-awareness in this respect.

> I don't try to be prejudiced, and if I am, I don't realize it, but I mean, maybe I am. Maybe I'm just this total hypocrite, you know; I'm just flying off the wall here, but I don't think I am, and I don't realize it if I am. [Claire 429-130]

Though I searched for disconfirming evidence, I could find few instances in the interviews where her exposure to new or conflicting ideas about racial issues led Claire to reflect on and re-evaluate her existing attitudes and beliefs. (It is possible, of course, that she did her questioning and re-examining outside of the interviews, but frankly, I feel that that is unlikely.) One instance occurred during the second interview, which took place shortly after the class had viewed the "True Colors" video. Claire offered the following initial reaction to the video:

> I really didn't think there was that much difference out in the real world. I kind of sat there in shock. . . . I guess I just didn't realize that it was that different, you know, that they're treated that different.
> *But you saw evidence, didn't you?*
> Yeah, this is true. Unfortunately, it obviously happens. [Claire 211-367,385]

The impact of the video, however, seemed to be short-lived, for as I reported earlier in this chapter, within a few weeks Claire had somehow reconstructed the message of the video so that it no longer illustrated racial discrimination and, hence, no longer conflicted with her deeply-held belief that everyone has equal opportunities in this society. In another instance, when Claire expressed the belief that the ratio of majority students to minority students on campus was about 50-50, I corrected her by saying the ratio was more like, at best, 80-20. She responded, "I thought it was close to 50-50, you know, without any numbers or anything. I guess it's not. So I guess in that aspect there isn't as much diversity as there should be" [Claire 412-184]. Claire expressed mild surprise, but she seemed to have no difficulty accepting these figures. I suspect that the reason Claire let go of her belief so easily was that, because she was only guessing about the majority to minority ratio, it was not a belief that she strongly held. One other instance when Claire responded positively to a conflicting idea occurred during our fifth interview. In this interview we had a long discussion about whether or not there were advantages to being White in this society. At one point we had the following exchange:

> *Aren't there a lot of different ways that there are advantages to being White because you're constantly reinforced, but if you're over here, you're either put down or you're not as visible, so you don't feel good about yourself?*
> Yeah, I guess, I think it is possible. (Pause) As far as in that aspect, I think it's a lot on the student and the child's part to--, okay, they're gonna know that they're in the minority, but they've got to look at it that it's the other person's problem if they feel they have to pick on me, the minority child whatever. I think a lot of it is just going to be ignoring it and realizing that they are just as good as the next person. Unfortunately, this may put extra burden on the minority child, but again, it doesn't mean they have any less of an opportunity. . . . [Claire 412-004]

While she initially seemed to accept the plausibility of the idea being presented to her, she then proceeded to try to explain it away and to show me that it didn't conflict with her belief that everyone has equal opportunities, even though it seems rather contradictory to say on the one hand that minority children will have an extra burden, but then on the other hand say that this extra burden doesn't result in any less opportunity for them.

While I have argued that Claire showed little awareness of and little ability to reflect critically on her attitudes and beliefs, that is not to say she was completely lacking in these respects. For example, she demonstrated some self-awareness on one occasion when I asked her to compare herself to a person in an article that the class had read.

> *In what ways do you see yourself as being similar to Vanessa, and in what ways do you see yourself as being different?*
> As far as being similar, she said that it doesn't matter if they're Black or White or whatever. I feel the same way. It doesn't matter what somebody is, but yet you've got to be able to realize that, like, you are Black and your culture is different, so not to hide--, to be able to celebrate your diversity but also to be able to say that you're just as equal as I am. I feel that's how I'm similar. As far as being different, as far as I know, I try not to use the contradicting terms that she did. "Well, I'm not prejudiced, but the Blacks do this." Well, you know, for instance, Blacks maybe are poor. There's White people that are poor, too. There's Black people that are rich; White people--- Without realizing it, you know, I don't think I do, but maybe I do. [Claire 412-205]

Evidence that I have cited earlier suggests that Claire was guilty of the same contradictory behavior of which she accused Vanessa (e.g., saying that people's color doesn't matter but also saying that Blacks are genetically inferior to Whites). Interestingly, however, she expressed an awareness that she might be behaving in that fashion even though she tried not to. In other words, she seemed to be aware that she might not be aware of some of her own prejudices. During the final interview Claire demonstrated some ability to reflect critically on her attitudes and beliefs.

> I try to give everybody an equal chance and, you know, everybody has an equal opportunity in general anyways, but I think also I've said that sometimes you don't realize you're doing something unless it's pointed out to you. There were times where I would think of something to say, and then I'd think, well, is that prejudiced, you know? I don't know. I guess maybe I just got to questioning myself because, you know, we've just been discussing it. . . . [Claire 429-130]

The above passage suggests that Claire did sometimes engage in self-questioning and critical evaluation of her ideas. Thus, Claire did show some evidence of openness and self-reflectiveness; however, in both of these qualities she was far, far behind Joy and Terri.

Joy. In my interviews with Joy throughout the semester, there was substantial evidence of her openness to others' ideas. For example, at one point during our second interview Joy expressed the belief that the media plays up the negative aspects of Detroit because a large percentage of the people who live there are Black.

> *What makes you think that that's the reason?*
> I think our society, like, sometimes tries to blame a lot of things that go wrong on Black people, for some reason.
> *What makes you think that?*
> I'm studying a lot right now about, like, the slave trade and all that, like going back to early colonial times, and I think a lot of that "the White man thinks they're better than the Black man" is still here, and it's called prejudice, and I think it's still there and I think it's a scapegoat for White people to blame it on Black people because, I mean,obviously the only difference is the color of our skin. I think White people honestly feel that they are better than Black people. . . . [Joy 210-65,68]

When asked to explain what was, to me, a rather surprising insight on her part, Joy made reference to what she was learning in another course, thus indicating that she had embraced at least some of the information that was presented to her in the course and that this information had become part of her

understanding of why things are they way they are. A second example of Joy's openness to others' ideas can be found in her response to the "True Colors" video.

> . . . to me it's just fascinating how in this day and age how everything's supposed to be so equal and equality blah, blah, blah, how things are not equal. . . . .It was more powerful the first time I saw it, but it was really neat to like, to see people in my class going, "I can't believe this really happens," you know. It was really, really fascinating to me. [Joy 210-228]

Unlike Claire, Joy had seen the video before, but she still found it "fascinating." Also unlike Claire, Joy did not reconstruct the central message of the video with the passage of time. In her final interview Joy said that she considered the video valuable because "it was a realization for me of how prejudiced our society is" [Joy 428-60]. Apparently, the video introduced Joy to new information, and she was open to it. A third example of Joy's openness occurred during our fifth interview. When I questioned her assertion that a White person walking down the street in a Black neighborhood would be discriminated against, Joy explained her reasoning:

> My thing is majority rule, and in any situation, like, when you have a group of people who get together and they're all the same, they're powerful, and they know they're powerful, and they can walk on people who aren't powerful.
> *When the first White people came here, your pilgrims, they were in the minority. The Indians were very friendly to those people and did not stomp on them, so is it really true that just because you're in the majority that you're necessarily going to step on people who are less? When Columbus came, they welcomed him..*
> Yeah, but maybe that's just the nature--, I don't know. I don't know. That's a good point. It totally contradicts what I just said. [Joy 407-128,136]

While there were many occasions in our interviews where Joy would argue her position, the above exchange illustrates that she remained open-minded in doing so. She was willing to listen to and seriously consider ideas that clearly conflicted with her own.

In addition to being open to others' ideas, Joy also indicated that she was open to diversity. During our first interview she commented,

> . . . you have to realize that everybody's different and because they believe in something different than you doesn't make them wrong; it doesn't make them horrible people whatever; that's just their views. I mean, what I think we need to teach our children is that being different is okay. [Joy 128-34]

It was very obvious to me, from other things that Joy said in the interviews, that she was genuinely interested in being exposed to and learning about people who were different. For example, in the second interview she explained why she thought it was important to have experiences with people of different backgrounds.

> I think the real reason I'm at Michigan State is because it's culturally diverse, and I feel that that's what the real world is going to be. I told you last time about the two high schools that were in my district. One was extremely culturally diverse, and I had the choice whether I could go to that one or go to a completely all-White, very upper-class school, and I chose the diversity one. When I was in eighth grade and I made that decision, it was the same decision I had to make going here. I looked at the schools, smaller schools, small Catholic schools, like, just because of the range, like, five or six thousand people. I'd like the small classes and the individual attention, but I realized that that's not how the real world's going to be. Michigan State, for me, with the diversity and the larger classes, as much as I hate 'em, that's how the real world is gonna be. You know, you're not gonna always have the individual attention. You're going to need to cope with struggling with that.
> *How's this going to prepare you for it?*
> How's it going to prepare me? Because if I have to learn how to deal with different types of people now, it's only going to benefit me with my career, like as a teacher. If I'm learning to deal with people, like for example, on my floor where I live, there are Black people, there are Indian

> people, there are Chinese people. If I'm interacting with these people on a daily basis, it's only going to help me when I get out into the real world because I've had situations before where--, it's like if I didn't, I wouldn't know what to expect. I would maybe have, like, classifications in my head of people and maybe prejudge. [Joy 210-001, 021]

Through the rest of our interviews, I really did not see any evidence that would lead me to question the sincerity of her openness to diversity. In fact, at one point she expressed disappointment that there was not more interaction between races at the university. She believed that interracial contact was an important key to improving interracial understanding.

> I think by working with 'em that that dissolves the stereotypes. I think if I didn't work with 'em, then those stereotypes would always be there. Like, unless you have an experience to go off of, why would your mind ever change? Do you see what I'm saying? Like, if I learn something, if I work with someone, then I'm going to be more apt to realize that that was a stereotype in my head and that people really aren't like that, you know. [Joy 210-448]

On many different occasions Joy also demonstrated considerable awareness of her own beliefs and attitudes, as well as the ability to think critically about them. For example, during our second interview, she showed surprising insight when she made the following observation:

> What really sticks out in my mind is when we do role-playing. I think that's so fascinating to take on a completely different opinion than my own. It kind of scares me because sometimes I can argue that opinion *really* well, and people are looking at me like, "Does she really think that?" I mean, something horrible, like about racism or stuff, and then I have ask to myself. You know, I made a lot of convincing arguments right there. Maybe this isn't--, do you see what I'm saying? Like, maybe there is a little bit of prej--, I know there's a little bit because I think we all have prejudice, but I think there is prejudice in the back of my head. For me to be able to argue a situation so well actually kind of scared me, you know. [Joy 210-228]

Joy recognized that perhaps one reason she was able to argue a racist's perspective so well was that she might actually hold some of those negative racial feelings herself. Unlike Claire, who appeared to be completely unaware that she possessed any type of negative racial attitude or belief, Joy expressed awareness of her racial prejudice.

> *Is it possible that the role-playing brought out your real feelings, and the rest of the time you're just pretending to be a certain way?*
> I'm sure it's possible. I'm sure some of the stuff that I said is in the back of my head. Do you know what I'm saying? Like some of the prejudice that I have. Yeah, I mean, I think a truth comes out, you know, when you do that kind of stuff. [Joy 210-322]

Instead of responding defensively to my question, as you might expect that she would, Joy once again demonstrated her openness to other's ideas as well as her willingness to be self-critical by acknowledging this possibility. Another example of Joy's self-awareness comes from our fifth interview, when she gave an example of one of her prejudices.

> . . . like I noticed like in my dorm, for example, I get really annoyed at--, I don't know if this is racist or whatever, but how typically loud the Black girls are in our hall, and I don't know that you could say that's racist or it's just me being, I don't know, anal sometimes I guess because I'm trying to study or whatever, but there are little things like that that maybe I guess I am because they're like a little racist or whatever, because I don't know if I---, okay, for example, there's like loud music going on like right across the hall from me, and there's two White girls, and [then] there's a huge, like, a bunch of girls, Black girls that are around, and they're all talking really, really loud and stuff, and it's the Black girls who I will get more like a feeling of "Pleeasse be quiet!" than it's the White girls, and I don't know why that is. I don't. I mean, I think that's racially, like, inside of me for some reason. I don't know. [Joy 407-335]

In my eyes, Joy shows great honesty and a lot of self-insight here. Not only was she aware that she had prejudices, she was able to clearly articulate one of them. In contrast, Claire was not even aware that

she had prejudices and, therefore, certainly was not able to articulate what they were. Yet another example of Joy's self-insight comes from the same interview.

> *So, is there a secret place down in you somewhere where you're racist?*
> No, I don't think that I'm racist, but I think I have had some racial imprints or something put in me, like, just when I was little and hearing my grandfather say something. I mean, that sticks in your head, you know. . . .
> *Give me an example of something that was implanted in you as you were growing up?*
> Like my grandpa, he's so bad, like when I was a little girl, he'd be talking or whatever, and every time he'd refer to Black people, he would say, "Burrhead," and so I never knew that was wrong until I said it to my mom one time, and she said, "What did you just say?!" And she explained to me that that is completely rude and wrong, and I just all of a sudden, I mean, I was ten years old and saying that word, not knowing that it was anything different than saying "a Black person," you know, so there's little stuff like that that you learn just by communicating with your elders or whatever, that they may have racial views and they express 'em, and not being able to differentiate whether that's good or that's bad, you just kind of take on those views, you know. [Joy 407-335,360]

This was one of many occasions in our interviews where Joy surprised me with her insight. She was aware that she possessed racial prejudices, she could recognize some of her prejudices, and she also had some understanding of how those prejudices probably originated. In addition, as explained earlier in this section of the chapter, she had reasonable ideas for how to combat her prejudices--through more interaction with individuals from different racial backgrounds. One final quotation from Joy's interviews illustrates both her openness to new ideas and her ability to be self-reflective.

> *Has talking with me this semester affected either your perceptions of the course or the way you think about any of the issues covered in the course?*
> Definitely. I think it's made me more aware about my views on different races and different subject areas. You've made me think a lot about myself and just my [beliefs], you know, like, what I thought. I mean, before this class I never thought I was prejudiced. I was like, "I'm not. What are you talking about?" But I, like, little stuff you made me realize that, yeah, like, I do have those feelings inside me that I don't know [inaudible], like, grotesque or whatever, but--, (brief pause) Yeah, I've learned a lot. [Joy 428-189]

Although I could cite many other examples, it should be pretty clear that Joy was much more aware of her racial attitudes and beliefs than was Claire, and she also showed much greater ability to look at her attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors critically.

Terri. In terms of her openness and self-reflectiveness, Terri was much more like Joy than Claire. There were several ways in which she demonstrated her openness to other's ideas. First, I consider being able to see the other side of an issue as a type of openness, and this was an ability that Terri demonstrated. During our third interview, Terri expressed her opposition to affirmative action scholarships. After some discussion, I asked her a question to determine whether or not she had any knowledge of the other side of the issue.

> *What are the reasons why some people advocate affirmative action?*
> Well, I think that a lot of it is that everybody's so sensitive about things right now and so sensitive about how people were treated in the past and how people are continued to be treated, and I think that a lot of times people are trying to make amends, you know, and saying now, "Well, we'll give you this special scholarship and this and that to show you that we aren't going to discriminate against you and we aren't--, this isn't going to happen and blah, blah, blah, in order to bring that person into that place, and I think that's a lot of times what happens. [Terri 314-055]

Unlike Claire, who seemed either unable or unwilling to see an issue from the opposite perspective, Terri demonstrated some understanding of the other side of the issue. Another example of her openness occurred during the first interview, when Terri indicated to me that the information being presented on racism and discrimination was not new to her.

> . . . a lot of the stuff that we've talked--, I guess it really hasn't been that much of a new experience to me, but I like to see other people because a lot of that stuff is so new to them, and a lot of the ideas and a lot of different things that we're talking about, I mean, talking about minority and talking about different things. I mean, to me it isn't really that different, but I can see that in the future a lot that we're talking about is in a lot of areas, such as being [blind] and deaf and different things like that, [that] I'm not very familiar with, and I'm kind of intrigued to learn about it and maybe even follow into the special education field. [Terri 131-193]

Given Terri's prior experiences with racism and discrimination, it would have been easy for her to take the attitude that the class was boring and a waste of her time, but instead she looked forward to learning about issues with which she was less familiar. In a similar vein, Terri's response to her viewing of the "True Colors" video also showed a type of openness. Not only had she seen the video previously, she knew from personal experience that racial discrimination was still a problem in this society. Nevertheless, she was still able to find value in watching the video again, as she explained,

> I just think that a lot of the different varieties that [the racial discrimination] came in--at the store and this and that, so I can see a store and I can understand. I've seen that before, so that wasn't really anything new, but even the car salesman, the man himself who was Black and didn't rush out there either, and the different prices and when they were confronted about it. It's just a lot of different things. I mean, I've never gone and priced a car, so I'm not--, I've never seen that before, so it's really just a lot of the different areas that you found it in. [Terri 217-342]

Again, Terri does not seem to take the attitude that she knows all that she needs to know; she clearly seems to be open to learning more. In our final interview, I found a third example of Terri's openness.

> *What if I told you after these interviews and so on that I came to the conclusion that you were prejudiced?*
> I'd listen to what you had to say, but (laughs) I probably would feel a little offended, you know. I'd want to know why you would say that. [Terri 426-177]

Though Terri had never said anything to give me the impression that she was racially prejudiced, I had not shared this impression with Terri, and I was curious to see how she would respond to the above question. I think it is noteworthy that her first inclination would be to listen to my reasons for thinking that she was prejudiced. To me, this is another example of her openness; I think that many, if not most, people would probably react defensively or maybe just ignore whatever I had to say because they *know* that they're not prejudiced. Terri didn't consider herself prejudiced, but apparently she would still be open to listening to my reasons for thinking she was prejudiced.

In my interviews with Terri there is abundant evidence of her openness to diversity. She was certainly one of the most open and most accepting individuals that I talked with. I think part of her openness was attributable to her many experiences with people from a variety of different backgrounds.

> My friends are from all different backgrounds, all different races, and when I sit in the class and when we talk in our lab, I hear people saying, "I've never met anyone that's different than me. My school was all White. My school was all this." Well, my school was very diverse. I learned all that--, I mean, I just think that a lot of the experiences I've had and knowing what to do and what not to do, I've learned definitely not to stereotype people, and I see so many people doing it here. It's because they don't know at all, and I think that I've been educated well enough. I mean, I just think that I have had enough experiences right now that a lot of these things we read about, a lot of these things I have already known, I've already experienced, but there's a lot of people in the class that are looking at this for the first time, and they're just thinking, "Oh, my gol." It's so new to them, but to me it's not new at all. [Terri 131-60]

Based on the preceding excerpt and on other comments that she made about various experiences that she had had, it was obvious that Terri did more than just express an openness to diversity; she actually seemed to live it, and one of her comments in the final interview illustrates that. I had asked Terri to explain why she thought she was part of the solution to the problem of racism and discrimination. She responded,

> I think that by my actions and by the things I do, I'm an example to people, and I never let a person ever get away with ever saying anything that's racist or anything around me. I will always make sure I say something; I don't ignore it, and a lot of people would, you know, who would say, "I'm not racist, I'm not this whatever," and would laugh at some kind of a joke or something, but I think that everything about me just shows that I'm not like that, so I think that by being an example to whomever it may be, I mean, people here, people there, whoever knows me or something, I think that that is kind of part of a solution. [Terri 426-131]

In my mind, Terri's actions signify a true commitment to respecting diversity. I am impressed with her recognition that ignoring or laughing at racist comments is a way of condoning those comments, and she will have no part of that because she wants to make sure that people know that she disapproves of such comments.

In addition to her openness, Terri also showed her self-reflectiveness through her awareness of her own attitudes and beliefs along with her ability to think critically about them. An example of Terri's self-awareness appeared in our second interview. I had asked her how she could be unprejudiced, as she had claimed, after growing up in a community with prejudiced people all around her. Her response was as follows:

> Well, obviously, I mean, my parents, they were prejudiced. They had a lot of prejudice in 'em, and my grandfather, oh my gol! I can't even say one thing to him. He's from the upper peninsula, so, I mean, he's just horrible, but I think that it kinda comes within yourself. I mean, within myself I just--, I guess it's just something that I've done myself to learn to see. I've seen all the injustice. I've heard my friends talk about different things that have happened to them and a lot of different things like that, and I just see that I could never be like that and that I would never want to do that to anyone, and that I find it, like, rewarding. I mean, a lot of people don't reach out and have friends from cultural and ethnic different backgrounds whatever, but I enjoy having people. I don't want somebody who's exactly like me. That would be so boring, to have someone exactly like me. . . . [Terri 217-095]

When I have asked other students this question, some of them have had difficulty coming up with an appropriate response. Terri, however, showed what I consider to be a type of self-awareness when she was able to provide at least a partial response, although I'm sure there were other factors involved of which she was unaware. She seemed to be saying that despite the presence of prejudiced attitudes around her, she had made a conscious decision not to adopt those attitudes Plus, it seems apparent that having a number of friends from different racial backgrounds was instrumental in helping her come to understand the effects of racial prejudice and discrimination. One example of her ability to think critically about her attitudes and beliefs appeared during our second interview as well. Terri had commented that some of her ideas were changing, and I asked her to elaborate.

> Well, the issue that we talked about concerning the answer that I gave with the kids in the class speaking Black English, and I was saying that I would expect them to speak proper English, and I now realize, you know, that that was kind of a very shallow answer for myself, and through a lot of the reading and a lot of the examples that we've done in class, too, even today in discussion, I see that there really is no basic, standard English language. It's just, you know, what I myself have perceived and so I think I've kind of made amends on that feeling. [Terri 217-220]

I think this excerpt shows that Terri was reflective, in that after the interview in which we discussed the issue of Black English, she continued to think about the issue and her position on it. This excerpt also shows that Terri was able to be critical of her own attitudes and beliefs. Additionally, I think it serves as another illustration of her openness to new ideas because, as she explained, the readings and other experiences in the class led her to change her position on the use of Black English. Another good example of her self-reflectiveness occurred during our final interview.

> *Has talking with me this semester affected either your perceptions of the course or the way you think about any of the issues covered in the course?*

> Yeah, yes, I would have to say. I don't know what it is but sometimes, like, talking to you, I'll say whatever first comes to my mind, and I'll just get all mixed up with what I'm saying, and I won't really think about it, and then I'll get up to my room and I'll think, "What was I saying? Why did you answer it that way?" or whatever, and for some reason, I mean, it'll be on my mind for a couple of days or whatever, and I'll just be like, "How could I have answered that?" I kind of work it out in my head, you know, what I was trying to say or what I was meaning and stuff, but I do think sometimes it really challenged me, you know, of what to and what not to say, and I don't know, I would always be thinking, "No, that wasn't the right answer," you know; "I should have said this or that," so I think it did challenge me. [Terri 426-151]

In this excerpt Terri illustrated that she often critically reflected on what she had said during her interviews with me, questioning the things that she had said, pondering what her ideas really were, and trying to think of ways that she might express them more clearly.

In summary, the qualitative data reported in this section clearly suggest that Claire, the focus student who demonstrated the least movement toward developing more favorable racial attitudes and beliefs, was also the student who demonstrated the least openness and the least self-reflectiveness. On the other hand, Terri, who began the course with very favorable racial attitudes, and Joy, who seemed to be moving in the direction of developing more favorable attitudes, both demonstrated considerable openness to diversity and to new or conflicting ideas, as well as a high degree of self-reflectiveness, particularly self-awareness and the ability to be self-critical. Thus, it appears that the personal qualities of openness and self-reflectiveness may be important variables determining how students' respond to courses on diversity, and these qualities may need to be taken into consideration along with students' entering racial attitudes and beliefs.

Conclusions

The findings reported in this study seem to further reinforce the conclusions of my larger study and to suggest that multicultural education courses may be most effective for students who already possess more favorable racial attitudes and for those who display a quality of openness and an ability to be self-reflective. For Terri, a high-scoring student, the course seemed to be primarily a reaffirmation of what she already felt and believed. Although Joy and Claire both scored low on the racial attitude survey, Joy's comments in the interviews suggest that she held more favorable attitudes and beliefs than Claire and that she seemed to internalize more of the central messages of the class than did Claire, particularly the message that many minority students still face unequal opportunities to learn. Additionally, my analysis of the data on Joy and Claire indicated that Joy's attitudes and beliefs appeared to be moving in the desired direction in some respects, possibly because of her openness to different perspectives and because of her inclination to be self-reflective, whereas Claire's attitudes and beliefs appeared to be largely unaffected by the course, possibly because she seemed reluctant to look at issues from a different perspective and was not very self-reflective. While the data collected in this study clearly support the idea that students' entering racial attitudes and beliefs serve as filters through which they perceive the information being presented to them, the differences that I observed in how Joy and Claire responded to the course would seem to suggest that a student's openness to new information and his/her ability to be self-reflective may be additional important factors affecting not only their perception of information on diversity but also their likelihood of altering their racial beliefs and attitudes. Finally, in terms of her White Racial Identity Development (Helms, 1990), Claire was obviously in the Contact stage, which is the lowest stage. Helms postulated that "one's longevity in the Contact stage depends upon the kinds of experiences one has with Blacks and Whites with respect to racial issues" (p. 57). However, the present study suggests that students' "longevity in the Contact stage" may also be influenced by their levels of openness and self-reflectiveness.

Implications

This study's findings would seem to have several important implications for teacher educators. First, since students' racial attitudes seem to serve as filters through which they interpret the information presented in a course on diversity, the entering beliefs and attitudes of students will need to be identified and taken into consideration in the instruction. Different students may need to be taught different things and in different ways in order to challenge unfavorable racial attitudes and beliefs. Second, students' personal qualities like openness and reflectiveness also appear to have an important influence on their learning in a course on diversity. These qualities may also need to be taken into consideration in

instruction, though this is an area where further research is needed. Finally, teacher educators should begin to acknowledge that multicultural teacher education courses will probably be most effective for students who already possess favorable racial attitudes and least effective for those who possess unfavorable attitudes. These findings raise the question of whether the selection of candidates for admission into teacher education programs should be based in part on their racial attitudes and beliefs and on their prior interracial experiences, as Haberman (1987) has suggested. Perhaps, too, personal qualities like openness and self-reflectiveness should also be considered.

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